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ABSTRACT

As part of the demonstration aspect of its service, the Child and Family Development Center of the Chicago Child Care Society developed a day care program for 2-year-olds. Because children who had been at ease with teachers and comfortable without parents became less involved with play and more clinging and demanding when additional children were later enrolled, staff decided to emphasize the group rather than the individual: All children, accompanied by their parents, would be enrolled on the same day. A model enrollment process was developed that gradually increased distance between parents and their children and varied the time the child spent at the center. Parents were expected to remain closely involved during the first 6 weeks. During that time, staff continued the pattern established during enrollment and operated under the general principles of simplicity, constancy, and familiarity. During the third year of the enrollment model, staff (1) intensified the focus on preparing the child and parent for the new experience and (2) established closer home/center communication through home visits, snapshots used to bridge the home and center environments, and videotaping of children's activities. (RH)

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ENROLLING TWO-YEAR-OLDS IN DAY CARE

ONE CENTER'S EXPERIENCE

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"Is it good for two-year-olds to be placed in day care?" Staff of the Child and Family Development Center of Chicago Child Care Society[1] asked themselves that question in the Spring of 1977. The issue raised intense feelings. Staff felt strongly that young and immature children do not belong in group care but that they need to be at home with their primary care givers in an intimate setting. Experience in the Center had demonstrated that, even for older children in day care, separation is the central issue. However, there was growing need and increasing demand for this kind of service, especially by single parents who had to work. Staff finally decided, after long and ardent discussion, that the Center had an obligation, as part of the demonstration aspect of its service, to develop a day care program for two-year-olds and to make it as healthy as possible for the developing child. Much credit must be given to staff who dared initiate this project, which was so highly charged emotionally.

Staff have learned a great deal about working with two-year-olds in group care. The child's first days in the classroom, which imply eventual separation from the parent, have been identified as the most upsetting time, not only for the child and the parent, but for teachers as well. Staff have always questioned: "Is it wise, during the enrollment process for a parent to leave a protesting child at the classroom door?" The child may calm

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1. Chicago Child Care Society is a social agency which, in addition to offering direct services to children and families, is a demonstration, teaching, and research center. The Child and Family Development Center offers service to the total family through its enriched day care experience for the preschool and kindergarten child and through a partnership for family development between the Center and the family. Social workers deal with the family around the child's adjustment and any marital or personal problems.

down the minute mother or father is out of sight but fears and feelings of abandonment are common and remain. The parent is anxious and often feels guilty. The teacher is concerned and sometimes apprehensive. We have found that gradual enrollment in which the parent and teachers work together to ease the pain of parting takes longer but has proven well worth the effort. Parents and teachers must have time and opportunity to feel comfortable with each other and to begin to build a working relationship. Children need to know that their parents trust the teachers. As they become familiar with what is going on in the new setting and realize that separation is only temporary, the fun of learning and doing helps the child to cope with the pain of being without the parent.

Edna Furman, in an article in Young Children, May 1978, spoke eloquently to this point, when she said,

> It is often thought that children who do not react, do not make a fuss, or even enjoy the parents' absence, are well-adjusted, good children. To me, these children have not built appropriate mental muscles to bear unpleasant feelings. They shut themselves off from such feelings and therefore have no control of them. For nursery school teachers an excellent time to practice with children in building up the mental muscles for knowing and bearing unpleasant feelings is, of course, during entry to nursery school. At that time one can help parents understand that children who have no feelings, who react as though nothing has happened, or who immediately "love" the school, are children who are shut off from their feelings and in danger of stunting their emotional growth. Many mothers who do not welcome the child's unhappy or angry response to separation at the start of school would be very concerned if the child did not react feelingly to the loss of a loved person or readily preferred someone else in that person's stead. Yet how could a child acknowledge very intense feelings without previous help to cope with them in less threatening situations?

Can children be helped in group situations in ways that do not block the development of feelings? Can the physical separation from parents which occurs as children enter day

care be used to enhance emotional development? Are there ways in which the process of enrolling two-year-old children in day care can be made more comfortable for child, parent, and teacher? This article recounts enrollment experiences at the Center over the past five years.

THE FIRST YEARS

Firmly believing in the value of small groups for young children, now validated by the National Day Care Study, staff set group size at ten. In the first two years, seven children were enrolled in the fall with three additional ones entering in the new year; in the third year, there were six children initially, and two enrolled in January. Staff found that the group of six or seven offered too little peer stimulation, while the group of ten two-year-olds was too large for two teachers to be responsive. Toddlers' needs are many and it is difficult for them to wait and share teacher's attention. Ten children also proved overstimulating for the individual child. Adding children at a later time during the year was undesirable, because the late-comers remained outsiders and could not be absorbed into the original group.

In addition to class size and timing of enrollment, other problems surfaced. Children, accompanied by their parents, had been enrolled in pairs, bi-weekly. As the children became absorbed in the surroundings, parents would leave the classroom but were asked to remain on the premises. If the children seemed comfortable, the following day the parents were free to leave the building but stay on call. By the end of the second or third day the children

seemed to feel at home. However, this peace was short-lived. As new children, with their parents, entered, children previously at ease with the teachers and comfortable without the parents became less involved with play, more clinging and demanding. The enrollment of additional children seemed to reawaken the pain of separation. As the number of two-year-olds increased to four, six, or eight, two teachers were hard pressed to help the children handle their grief at the separation. Children expressed their anger in ~~constant~~ crying, screaming temper tantrums, and rejection of teachers' attempts to comfort them. The result was: unhappy children, unhappy parents, and perplexed and exhausted staff.

Evaluating the First Two Years

In analyzing what had happened and seeking ways to make beginning days easier for all, staff examined classroom environment, program and the manner in which parents had been involved. The classroom and program had been arranged in accordance with the principles of normal child development and early education, with a focus on the individual and on relationships. Since two-year-olds cannot verbalize their needs and interests, parents, beginning in the first year of the program, had been asked to participate in a one-hour weekly group meeting with their children's teachers. These meetings had been valuable for parents and staff but both questioned continuing them for a full year. As staff pursued their analysis, it became clear that too little attention had been paid to the children's ability to cope with an unfamiliar environment. Specifically, what needed to be addressed were the children's coping skills for living in a group.

The Plan

After much deliberation, staff decided to emphasize the group rather than the individual and developed the following plan.

* Class size would be maintained at eight.
* All the children, accompanied by their parents, would be enrolled on the same day.
* During beginning days, children and parents would be approached as a group. Activities planned would emphasize group participation.
* During the initial days of enrollment, staff would be expanded to four.
* Classroom environment would be stripped of all unnecessary stimulation. Enough identical equipment would be available so that each child could have one of the same thing.
* During beginning days, parents would be closely involved in the program. The first day they would be asked to accompany their children and go through the sequence of activities with them.
* The first day would include all the activities and routines in the regular sequence but each segment would be short. The following days, each program segment would be gradually lengthened according to the child's tolerance.
* Parents would be asked to participate in a weekly group meeting with the teachers for six weeks to enhance the communication between home and Center and among the parents themselves.

The following is a description of what occurred during enrollment the last three years of our program for two-year-old children.

THE LAST THREE YEARS

INTAKE PROCESS

During the summer, the director of the Center called a group meeting for all the parents interested in having their two-year-old children attend the Center in the fall. The over-all philosophy of the agency, which is based on the psycho-dynamic and developmental theories of Freud, Mahler, Erikson, and Piaget, and the goals and methods of the Child and Family Development Center in particular were discussed. The teachers, responsible for the children's experiences in the classroom explained the daily program. Social workers, who deal with the family around the child's adjustment to the Center and around any marital or personal problems of the parents, defined their role. Parents were encouraged to ask questions: Did these philosophies fit into their lives, their expectations, their view on education, their goals and their work schedules?

Work schedules and the Center's stand on limiting the two-year-olds' hours from 9 to 3 were a major topic of discussion. Long experience with children in group care has demonstrated that length of stay has much to do with the comfort of a child. The younger the children the more apt they are to lose the connection between themselves and their absent parents and to feel abandoned. Edna Furman, in the article in Young Children previously noted, referred to these feelings. She said, "When separations are too long they become unbearable and therefore not conducive to experiencing feelings. A very few hours of separation are bearable to a baby, perhaps only half a day for a toddler ... " Hence, the maximum time spent in the Center for the youngest children had been set from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For some parents, this schedule proved impossible and they withdrew.

Those parents who remained interested in the program were contacted for an individual assessment interview attended by the child, the parents, the social worker assigned to the family, and the teachers. The discussion at the intake meeting had initiated the process of establishing a working relationship. By the end of an assessment, family and staff knew each other well enough to decide whether they wanted to work as partners.

The assessment is designed to clarify the developmental needs of the child and the kinds of supports the family can use from the Center. It includes exchanging information about the philosophies of childrearing and practices of both the family and the Center, the recording of the child's developmental history, and observation of the child. Staff observe the behavior of the child in a new environment with parents and with peers.

The decision to enroll a child depends on several factors based on the developmental history and staff observation:

* Does the child appear interested in what's going on? In toys? In other children? In the classroom setting? In the adults?
* What does the child's developmental history say about current development?
* Does the parent seem ready to let the child go?

The Center does not accept a child who has been diagnosed as psychotic or severely mentally retarded. Being toilet-trained is not a requirement for enrollment.

THE SCHEDULE* - First Six Weeks of the Program for Two-Year-Olds
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Time Frame**	Activities
9:00	Indoor Group Activities Welcome Snack Play Dough Wheel Toys and Dolls Toileting
10:00	Outdoor Activities Sand Box - grassy area
11:00	Return to Room Lunch
11:30	Toileting Get pillow, book and cuddly toy On cot with teacher sitting beside cot (option: teacher reading quietly to child) Recorded music
12:00	Naptime
2:30	Getting up - toileting - dressing Snack
3:00	Good-bye

Notes: * On the first day at 10 a.m., the schedule handed to the parent included detailed instructions to be followed during the mini-day.

** These are approximate times; it is the sequence which is important.

ENROLLMENT

First Day

On enrollment day, a Monday, eight parents with a two-year-old each arrived at the Center at 10 a.m. It is important to start the enrollment process on a Monday; five consecutive days of a similar structure and routine can develop the initial trust necessary for successful separation of child and parent. It had been arranged that the parent less attached accompany the child during the initial days; thus the pain of separation for both may be less intense. The teachers passed out the schedule, noting time changes for the first two days. Teachers stressed that such "mini-days" would help the children remember the sequence of activities and, by maintaining a familiar structure, would facilitate the development of feelings of security and trust. Parents were encouraged to review the schedule with their children at home.

Led by the two teachers, a group of twenty - the Center program director and Center receptionist were serving as assistants - entered the classroom which contained only the furniture and equipment that would be used initially. Toys were hidden behind a partition and there was only one large wall decoration.

Parents were asked to show the assigned locker space to their children and deposit in it a change of clothes from home and a favorite toy or blanket which the children had brought. Then all had juice and crackers, parents sitting behind their children at the table. When the snack was finished, the next activity, exploring playdough at another table, was initiated. One teachers and her assistant served as models to children and parents, playing with the

pliable dough in many different ways, while talking and singing about what they were doing. The other teacher and her assistant joined in this activity but their role was to move about freely to help wherever necessary.

When the children's interest started to wane, after about ten minutes, they were invited to explore the room and use wheel toys and dolls - there were enough for all! The children were always accompanied by their parents who were receiving instructions from the teachers. The rationale behind this approach is that teachers were to try to form an alliance first with the adult of the parent-child unit. Once that had been established and the children saw that parents followed teacher's instructions, they would do the same. In other words, ~~the child~~ children observed that their parents have given permission to the teachers to be their substitutes during the time the child is at the Center, and trust can develop between the child and teacher.

After free play, which lasted another ten to fifteen minutes, it was time for toileting with parents again assisting their children. Then parents, children and three staff members moved outdoors together, while the fourth set up the room for lunch and nap.

The large outdoor area connected to the Center can easily be overwhelming for little ones. Therefore, the children's play space was limited to a grassy area and the sand box, with parents in charge of maintaining these limits.

Returning to the classroom after about fifteen minutes, parents, with their children at their assigned places, sat down for lunch. Bathroom routine followed, after which the children were shown their assigned cots for nap. Children took their pillows, cuddly toys

(from home or school), and story books to their cots. Their parents read to them. The teacher then put on a record of gentle music which was the signal for the children to lie down quietly, with their parents sitting on a chair beside them. Those children who were relaxed and fell asleep followed the afternoon schedule. Those children who didn't fall asleep after about fifteen minutes of quiet were taken home by their parents.

What has been described of the first day took no more than two hours - until noon - each segment of activity or routine lasting fifteen minutes or less.

Second Day

The second day started one half hour earlier and followed the same pattern with all segments slightly expanded in accordance with the children's tolerance. Parents had prepared the children for a new development. During the children's snack, the parents would have coffee outside the classroom and return later. The social workers joined the parents outside and were available to pick up on their anxieties with regard to separation and other issues.

The children had remembered well the activities of the previous day. Teachers were ready to recall the parent group at any moment, but there was no need for it. At lunch time, parents returned to the classroom. However, instead of sitting together with their children, they were asked to have lunch at a separate table, thus demonstrating that they formed a group of their own, slightly removed from that of the children and teachers, though still close enough to be seen. Parents put their children to bed, sat with them for a while, and as the record stopped, moved into the background of the room permitting staff to take over. Parents had prepared their children for this change. More children were able to fall asleep; the others

were taken home by their parents.

Third Day

Because the children had mastered the mini-days, the third day at the Center started at 9 a.m. Most of the parents left the premises as their children seemed comfortable. However, in case their children needed them, they were asked to stay close to a telephone and to return to the Center at naptime. In general, the day went smoothly, and few of the children needed to contact their parents before the planned reunion after naptime. The first two years using this model, it took a week to ten days until all children could manage naptime at the Center. These difficulties appeared linked to many different influences, for example: being accustomed to taking a nap at a later time, lack of sufficient parent preparation, a greater anxiety in the child and/or the parent. With careful planning and more intensive parental involvement, the third year, every child stayed for the full day by Wednesday.... and slept!

THE FIRST SIX WEEKS

Parent Participation

Parents were expected to remain closely involved during the first six weeks for two-year-olds in the Center. For children too young to communicate verbally, such close interaction is a necessity! Parents had the opportunity to work with the staff, informally, on a daily basis as they brought their children in the morning or picked them up in the afternoon, and as they participated in weekly group meetings. At these times, they could communicate

information about their children's lives and family happenings to staff. Staff in turn could describe the children's experience in the Center. The parent group, in particular, offered an open forum to parents and teachers for asking questions, voicing concerns, hearing parents' and teachers' problems, and experiencing the universality of struggles around separation regardless of diverse racial, cultural, and social backgrounds. It also offered an opportunity for parents and teachers to feel supported by other adults. The meetings brought parents and teachers closer together and strengthened the working relationship from the very start. Trust could develop, which in turn made it easier for the children to trust the teachers.

Children's Adjustment

During the initial six weeks, staff continued the pattern established the first three days and operated under the general principles of simplicity, constancy, and familiarity. Only one variable at a time was altered when physical space, equipment, or program activities were changed. The children benefited from the stability of structure and teacher and peer relationships. Within these parameters, the children became autonomous in a short span of time. They were able to do things for themselves that they could not do in the beginning. They had internalized the sequence of events and this experiential knowledge had been reinforced by the teachers and the parents who labelled the activities and talked with the children about them. There were, of course, differences from one child to another depending on maturation. Besides increased mastery of physical skills, such as taking off sweaters and shoes, other learning took place. For instance, on enrollment day, the child's name with a colorful symbol had been placed on each child's locker. The teacher had chosen the sym-

bol according to the child's personality or interest - a ball, a car, a flower, etc. This symbol indicated the children's personal belongings at school and would be attached to chairs at the lunch table, to pillows at nap, and eventually to jobs on the job chart. Within a short time, most children were able not only to find their own lockers, chairs, and pillows, but also everyone else's. They may not have been able to pronounce the names of their peers but they were able to hand them their pillows or let them know if they sat on the wrong chairs. One little girl even matched the symbols from the job charts with the appropriate child's picture!

Special Sources of Help

In addition to the careful planning for the children's enrollment days and first six weeks, and the opportunity for close communication with parents around their children's needs, other sources of help have come from modern technology, modern living conditions, and the world of nature.

Occasionally, a telephone talk with a parent, initiated by the child, has calmed a homesick little one and provided refueling until the parent returned later in the day. Another helpful modern device has been the tape recorder. By naptime, when the parent was most actively missed, a tape with mother's or father's accustomed voice soothing the child and telling a well-known story has worked wonders. The tape recorder is under the child's control; thus the child is in charge and can make the parent appear and disappear upon command.

A king-size mattress has proven most valuable in the classroom. It has been used for resting purposes in mid-morning and has provided a safe outlet for the two-year-olds' very

active bodies. Children have jumped, rolled, tumbled on it, first in parallel motion to peers, later touching a peer, or interacting with a group of children. A drum or a record might stimulate such activities.

The presence of a pet in the classroom has been helpful to the children in overcoming the pain of separation. During the past three years, guinea pigs and an ample supply of carrot and celery pieces have been added to the basic equipment. The children's interest in the pets, in feeding and taking care of them, often reduce the loneliness after the parents leave the classroom and before the children felt at home in the Center setting. They could play the role of the giving parent toward the small and helpless animal and by doing so overcome their own helplessness. Any pet that can be touched or cuddled and is strong enough to withstand squeezes by small hands might serve this purpose.

THIS PAST YEAR

During the third year of the model, staff intensified the focus on preparing the child and parent for the new experience, and establishing closer communication between parents and staff once the child was enrolled in the Center.

Home Visit

Shortly before the time of enrollment, a teacher of the two-year-old group made a home visit to each family. A time, agreeable to all, had been set in advance. The purpose of the visit was to establish a bridge between home and Center:

* teachers wanted to renew contact with the child in the home setting to round out impressions gained at the assessment and to help the children remember their visit to the Center.

* parents could be helped to instill more confidence in their children by reviewing the schedule and expectations with them.

* children needed a tangible object to help them remember that a new experience was in the offing. They were given a name tag with their symbols which would help them locate their lockers, chairs, and pillows during the first day. In addition, photos of the children and their parents were taken.

Photographs

The snapshots made during the home visit were mounted on tag board under clear contact paper. One photo stayed at the Center and one was given to parent and child. These photos formed a tangible bridge between the two environments and helped in mastering separation issues. Children looked at, clutched, and fondled these photos extensively during routines and especially at naptimes.

Parent-Staff Communication

Communication between teachers and parents was strengthened by noting on a chalkboard the activities which the children had done on any given day. Thus, parents could relate to and talk with the children about their experiences at the Center. Records were kept on each child as to toileting, and other daily routines; parents could glance at these for information. Thus parents and teachers had more time for communication that was not routine.

Video-taping

No verbal account can describe a classroom filled with two-year-olds. Video tapes have been used to help parents feel the dynamic quality of the day: the constant movement and change of activity, mood swings, explosiveness, swarming, and need for individual attention. Staff hope to expand videotaping, especially during beginning days, not only for the

parents' benefit, but also for teachers' learning.

SUMMARY

From our experiences with two-year-old children in group day care for the past five years, we have found that the initial separation from parents can be eased when:

* the children are enrolled in a group of not more than eight, and parents are actively involved so that their interest can strengthen the child's positive attitude.

* the teacher-child ratio is expanded to ~~two~~ One to ~~one~~ Two during the beginning days, thus more closely approximating the home interactional environment. Children are capable of relating to other nurturing adults if the movement from a one-to-one relationship with mother or father has been gradual and not too much is asked too soon. Extra adults in the classroom support this process.

* the structure remains firm and unchanging, gradually expanding the time sequence from mini- to regular day. For children, security comes with familiarity. The stability and consistency of the sequence of activity is more important than the amount of time spent with each activity because, although two-year-olds do not have a time sense, they do remember sequence.

* the environment and the initial activities are kept at a low stimulus level, changing not more than one variable at a time. The low stimulus level permits the child to feel secure, and to explore fully the materials at hand. One change at a time gives ample opportunity to expand play at the same time continuing to strengthen the child's ability to cope with new surroundings.

* communication with parents is enhanced by the process of parent group discussion. The very young child does not have the verbal skills to communicate with the teacher. The parents' help is of vital importance in interpreting or clarifying their child's behavior to staff. The mutual support derived from such open sharing enables all adults to be more understanding of the children and of one another.

Aspects of this approach that staff want to study further are:

* the discomfort felt by teachers the first couple of days because of the number of adults in the classroom. There were twelve adults in the classroom in addition to the eight children. It felt crowded.

* the monotony felt by the teachers in keeping program stimulation to a minimum the first six weeks even with the realization that they are meeting the two-year-olds needs for sameness.

* the sources of teachers' comfort and gratification in working with the two-year-old in a group. What are the characteristics of teachers who work well with two-year-olds?

* the demand made on parents' time and emotional commitment was felt by some parents to be greater than they had anticipated. Each parent made a commitment to be involved initially for two or more days in the classroom, to attend parent group meetings regularly, to be available on an as-needed basis during the child's stay at the Center, and to share with teacher and/or social worker whatever happens outside the Center.

All in all, we believe the benefits resulting from this approach to enrolling two-year-olds in day care have far outweighed the discomforts and difficulties. Staff who participated in the development of this enrollment model have found it useful and enjoyable. Parents have become increasingly responsive and involved. The two-year-olds from last year are socially and emotionally competent, and intellectually curious three-year-olds. This past year, the ease of entry of the new children has also continued to document the model's strengths.

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